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SERVICE DATE - JUNE 9, 2003

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-6 (Sub No. 404X)

**The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company- Abandonment Exemption -
In Webster County, Nebraska**

BACKGROUND

In the above entitled proceeding, The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its line of railroad between M.P. 87.02 near Blue Hill, and M.P. 96.30 near Bladen, a distance of approximately 9.28 miles in Webster County, Nebraska. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

According to BNSF, there has been no local traffic on the line for two years. Though there are six bridges that are 50 years old or older, the Nebraska State Historical Society has stated that none are of historical significance.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

BNSF submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. BNSF served the environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. In its environmental report, BNSF states that "any salvage operations that may result will be in accordance with BNSF's general practice of requiring its private contractors to comply with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to the environment, including, but not limited to noise, air quality, water quality, and items of archaeological significance."

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and subject to the recommended mitigation, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and, therefore, no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line does take place, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Surface Transportation Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. However, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at (202) 565-1592 or mail inquiries to the Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC

20423, to the attention of Dana White, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-6 (Sub-No. 404X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Dana White, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1552, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at whited@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: June 6, 2003

Comment due date: June 22, 2003 **(15 days)**.

By the Surface Transportation Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

BLUE HILL - BLADEN, NE

NORTH

BLADEN MILEPOST 96.30

BLUE HILL MILEPOST 87.02

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